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FIRST NATIONS SOCIO-ECONOMIC FORUM - FOLLOW-UP BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC AND THE FIRST NATIONS

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Quebec City (June 16, 2007) - Following their commitments, representatives from federal and provincial governments and a number of First Nations Chiefs have been meeting in the Quebec Region over the past two days to follow up on the First Nations Socio-Economic Forum, which took place in Mashteuiatsh last October.

The meeting was chaired by the Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL), Ghislain Picard, and co-chaired by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Jim Prentice, and the Minister responsible for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs, Benoît Pelletier.

Also participating were: Quebec Premier Jean Charest; the Grand Chief of the Atikamekw Nation, Eva Ottawa, the Grand Chief of the Anishnabeg Tribal Council; Lucien Wabanonik, the Chief of the Community of Matimekush-Lac John, Thaddée André; the Chief of the Community of Mashteuiatsh, Gilbert Dominique; the Chief of the Community of Kawawachikamach; the Chiefs representing the Huron-Wendat Nation, René Gros-Louis and Benoît Sioui, and the Chief of the Community of Ekuanitshit, Jean-Charles Piétacho.

"The First Nations Socio-Economic Forum enabled us to establish shared priorities for the development of the Aboriginal Nations. It also gave us an opportunity to affirm our willingness to establish new mutual solidarities. Today, we have been able to take stock of the commitments that were made at Mashteuiatsh and what has been done since," said Mr Charest.

The discussions focused in part on progress made since the First Nations Socio-Economic Forum. The AFNQL presented its report and all parties confirmed their desire to continue working so that concrete results are achieved as soon as possible.

The subject of youth protection was also central to the discussions. "First Nations governments suggest that the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec join their efforts immediately to address the very pressing issue that currently exists with regard to the placement of First Nations children. Preventive measures must be strengthened and everything possible done to ensure support for the children and their families", said Chief Ghislain Picard.

The Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec and the First Nations are committed to continue working in partnership to find concrete solutions to the serious problems faced by Aboriginal communities with regard to youth protection, especially in terms of prevention, rapid response measures and the placement of children in permanent homes. A prevention-based approach ensures stability for children, and the effectiveness of this approach for the delivery of child services for First Nations has been demonstrated elsewhere in Canada.

"Children are the future of the First Nations, and it is our duty to work together to ensure they have a secure environment. I am truly proud of the commitment made by all parties here today and I am convinced that this partnership will make a real difference for First Nations' youth in Quebec", explained Mr Prentice.

"In that context, our hope is that the Government of Quebec and the First Nations of Quebec look to the tripartite model implemented in Alberta, which is already showing concrete results, and tailor it to the situation in Quebec", added Mr Prentice.

Land and resources were also discussed. "It was clearly established during the Socio-Economic Forum that the development of our communities requires access to land and natural resources. The time has come to take action. The First Nations reiterate that they are key to development of the regions", said AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard.

The Government of Quebec made a proposal that talks on this issue be better supported. "The issue of land and resources is a key concern in our relations with the First Nations. We have agreed on a method for working co-operatively to deal with these matters, so that we can learn better ways of living together", added Mr Pelletier.

At the close of the meeting, the parties reiterated their desire to develop new partnerships and their willingness to work assiduously toward their common objectives.

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